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THE SUPREMACY OF THE SPIRIT

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The problem of the physically handicapped is one of the spirit. There is probably no matter developing out of the war that will have a greater bearing on the future than the new conception of social justice due the person who is not able-bodied. Heretofore he has been looked upon with more or less toleration as a nuisance to be gotten out of the way as hurriedly as possible. He was condoned at home and shunned abroad.

In the country the boy who lost a foot in the mowing machine could not stay around the house indefinitely because of economic necessity. He had to go to town and be fitted with an artificial leg. If he were then unable to continue to do his work on the farm he had to learn some trade at which he could earn a living.

There has been more spirit developed under such circumstances among those in the country than in the city. Where there is a small population there is a more general knowledge of actual personal conditions and a corresponding tendency to improve them. This is not true in a city where people can live next door to each other for years as total strangers.

Up to 1911 in this country when the first financial liability was placed by law upon the employer, there had never been any general recognition of a social obligation to the injured. If the person had sufficient perseverance or intelligence or both to overcome the physical handicap, he succeeded, while on the other hand if he lacked those qualities, he failed. There is no half way average. Those who are not able-bodied must more than compete with the normal in spite of the unequal conditions, or sink to the level of dependency.

But now this is being changed. The man will still have to make the fight himself to surmount his difficulties, but through the experience of foreign countries and our own awakening to the facts, our common sense cries out that every disabled person must be given the training necessary for placement in a position that will be of a grade higher, if possible, than the one he formerly held.

The veteran is going to return with the honor chevron conspicuous on his right sleeve. He is going to be proud of his injury as a symbol of his service to his country. He is going to point to his artificial leg or other disfigurement as a reason why he should receive a new classification in the eyes of the public. Yet within a year or so when the glamor of narrative has worn off his recollections of the war, there will be no distinguishing mark to differentiate him from any other man with similar disabilities. It is for that time that we must prepare.

The problem of the physically handicapped falls quite naturally under two headings: the one relating to the individuals affected during the entire period of their treatment, training, placement and follow up; and the other to the attitude of the general public towards them.

The medical-surgical aspects have been given careful study in the past in spite of a scientific recognition grudgingly acknowledged. Orthopedic surgery has been wonderfully developed and has contributed to the restoration to active life of many persons who would otherwise have been sentenced to hopeless idleness. As a criterion of its importance during the present war it has been estimated that in Great Britain, at the end of the first year of fighting, from 30 per cent to 40 per cent of the casualties required orthopedic treatment "either in the way of preventing deformities or in doing actual corrective surgery or in the reconstruction and educational work."

The restoration of function through orthopedic surgery and various therapeutic measures is tangible and of a nature concrete. It is a reality. A patient can realize its curative and permanent value and assist in making it successful through his own efforts. During the period when most of this attention is being given, the patient is encouraged to occupy his time and mind with the beneficial exercises and work. In this it would seem that there should be little if any obstacle in securing the most willing coöperation, particularly in military hospitals where the sense of obedience is still dominant. Yet it is right here where the abstract influences have had to be taken most into consideration.

Frequently there exists a lack of interest on the part of the patient that seriously menaces his complete recovery. A man who has gone through terrible experiences and who has lived abnormally

for a considerable period of time may have lost some of the enthusiasm of independent life. Indeed it is marvelous that, knowing their military usefulness has been spent, they still can summon sufficient courage to fight their way back to health. Many of them undoubtedly would not be able to do so, were it not for the incentive given by the intelligent administering of those tireless hospital workers who contribute their own strength in awakening in the patient the desire to get back again into the work of the world.

According to the modern practice in disability cases, the mental attitude of patients is determined as soon as possible with the idea of alleviating any causes of worry or misunderstanding that would have a tendency to retard their medical progress. To a great extent this contact early established with the patients is in the nature of "cheer up work" which, however, soon develops into a more purposeful character. In England, Sir Robert Jones tells us:

The frequent revisions of pensions led to a stubborn resistance to treatment. Under gentle methods of persuasion, however, by both hospital staff and cured comrades, the men began to evidence a new attitude. They often did not want to get better lest it meant their worldly impoverishment, but the inspiration of mental repose and the tonic action provided in the curative workshops, proved to be vigorous stimulants for physical betterment.

At first many of the wounded in the American forces will also harbor the thought that they will never again be of any use and will recall the pencil venders and mendicants on the street corners at home. But under the careful guidance of their attendants, these fears will be gradually turned into a vision of self-support at occupations for which they will be specially trained. This change cannot be brought about in a day. It may often take months to overcome all the morbid apprehensions, but once the patients begin to take an active interest in their daily improvement it is only a matter of time before their fighting spirit will again show itself.

Nature either kills or cures. In the animal world the injured one is left to die or recover by his own efforts and while civilization has developed love, sympathy and healing qualities in the human, the animal instinct of self-preservation is still strong when finally aroused. When the disabled person leaves the hospital, however, no one can foretell what his mental outlook will be. He has been spurred on by the constructive inspiration in the hospital, yet now he looks out on a future of great uncertainty and doubt. He knows

that as a nation we have heretofore been content to accept the physically handicapped in the nature of a liability and have patronized them and given them alms, but have never sensed any fraternity towards them. He pictures, perhaps, among his acquaintances some man with injuries similar to his own who is earning a mere pittance for his work and he is not apt to be very enthusiastic over his opportunities. Then he learns that the government will restore him to a condition of self-support.

Upon the entry of the United States into the war, Congress was confronted with the necessity of enacting a pension law and wisely adopted the expedient of basing remuneration on two sets of schedules, the one designating the amount payable in case of a specific injury along lines similar to workmen's compensation measures and the other providing the variable amount according to the number of dependents.

While this was a distinct advance over any pension system which had hitherto been established, Congress was urged in vain, in the light of experience of foreign countries, to include provision for re-education. The American Red Cross, therefore, opened an experimental institution in New York City to demonstrate its practicability. The work was begun under two main divisions which might be designated as concrete and abstract. The concrete work consists of six training courses, an employment bureau and a department of industrial surveys. The training courses were selected to meet the requirements of those civilians who had arm or leg injuries. The employment bureau was started to find positions not only for the pupils taking the courses but also for other civilians physically handicapped who applied to the Red Cross for assistance in securing occupation.

It was found that manufacturers did not realize that there were any positions in their plants that were suitable for disabled persons to fill. In fact many were quite insistent that no one but an able-bodied person could do the work that was required. Industrial surveys were therefore undertaken in and about New York City to determine the operations in each industry that were available for disabled persons and found over 1,400 jobs. Under the stress of actual labor shortage many employers were quick to see the practical and economic advantages and extended every facility at their command.

In fact one corporation was so impressed with the possibilities of utilizing the men injured in its plants that it opened a department of re-education of its own. Another authorized its employment manager to train an armless man to become the "eyes" of the superintendent, while the board of directors of a third adopted the following resolution:

It shall be the business policy of this corporation, to regard all applicants for employment according to their actual capabilities, to be determined after a fair chance, and no person shall be discriminated against because of any manner of physical handicap or disability, providing that person can perform the allotted work in a satisfactory manner, in competition with others doing similar work for this corporation.

No matter how capable a person might be his utility is measured by his opportunity to demonstrate his usefulness. This truism is readily appreciated in respect to the ablebodied and is all the more significant in the case of those who have physical limitations. The greater work undertaken by the American Red Cross therefore is in the abstract field of research and public education.

Foreign experience indicated the difficulty in bringing about a general realization of the seriousness of the problem and accordingly a general educational movement has been undertaken to create an enlightened public opinion towards the physically handicapped, so that they will be regarded from the standpoint of their capabilities rather than their disabilities. This is undoubtedly the most important phase of the whole question. The disabled person has been encouraged to make light of his misfortune. He has acquired the proper spirit to work out his salvation and needs only the reassurance of home influences to spur him on to accomplish it.

What will be the attitude of those influences? Will there be the inclination to keep the injured person at home and support him in idleness? There will naturally be the temptation to do that. Also there will be a tendency for every one to wait upon him in every way possible. In the past the common practice has been to lavish such sympathy and charity on him that his very character has been demoralized by the intended but misdirected kindness. People have assumed him to be helpless and have only too often persuaded him to become so.

Every one has been guilty of giving alms to the person who sells shoestrings and in so doing has been actually hiring him to remain

on the corner. That is rather a brusque way of speaking of it but it is a fact. By contributing to his support the passerby has added to this degradation. Occasionally there has been a reform movement of some kind and an effort made to drive the beggar from the street, but it has always failed because there was no constructive end in view. Where could the disabled person go? What could he do? Besides, the police were unsympathetic. They have their superstitions or sentiment or whatever it may be called, about the number of dependents stationed on their beat. It is good luck to have a familiar landmark that the officer can look for as he turns the corner. Naturally the police felt that the beggar, who never had harmed any one, was just being persecuted. The new method of approach is to educate the policeman to the satisfaction of being self-respecting and self-supporting and let him be the social agent to show the beggar how little the disability really matters to the person who has the will to surmount it.

The problem of the physically handicapped is one of the spirit. Perhaps an incident that occurred the other day will best illustrate this fact and incidentally show how difficult it is to visualize a bodily ailment that is not obvious. In a certain office I met a man forty years old who stood six feet two and was straight as an arrow. A moment later his father aged sixty-five came swinging in on his hands. His legs had been amputated at the hips. After being introduced to the lowly man who shook hands with me cordially, he said: "My son has been telling me of the work that you are interested in and since you know so much about it which of us is disabled—myself with no legs or this six-foot son of mine?" I told him that I could not answer that question until I knew their respective capabilities. Then he explained that he was in excellent condition except for the loss of his legs, which he did not need in the practice of law, while the younger man in spite of his marvelous physique had a hidden spinal injury which prevented him from bending at the waist more than an angle of 15 degrees. For this reason the son had to be very gradual in his movements through the danger of physical collapse. Yet despite this handicap he too was a successful attorney.

The public must not judge the physically handicapped by the eye alone. There are often circumstances to be taken into consideration which are not manifest. Among the victims of industry there are many whose injuries do not show on the surface, while only a small

percentage of those returning from the front have visible wounds. Statistics recently compiled in England by the Ministry of Pensions, show that less than 10 per cent of the total casualties of the British troops are obvious disabilities. The new sense of public responsibility towards the handicapped must not be sight, but understanding.

How few think of all the thinking few
And many never think who think they do.

This fittingly describes our previous condition of public apathy towards the physically handicapped. It is not willful nor malicious but thoughtless and prejudiced.

The average person does not know that one who is disabled can be taught to do anything worth while. In fact until the results of reclaiming those maimed in the war were recently brought to his attention, he never had given the matter a thought. But his interest has now been aroused in the men wounded abroad and he reads with genuine happiness that the government has engaged to rehabilitate them. He wants to help and actually offers his services only to learn that in dealing with the disabled soldiers the proper place for all individual assistance is solely through the regular channels provided by the federal authorities. Then gradually our average person comes to appreciate the larger problem involved. He enumerates the handicapped people that he knows personally and feels a shock of satisfaction to find that they are all of superior intellect successfully competing with the able-bodied. This revelation inspires him. He is thrilled with a new incentive. The old proverb rings in his ears, "Where there's a will there's a way," and he realizes that his duty is to contribute the moral support and encouragement to all persons who have sacrificed their bodily well-being in the instrumentalities of civilization.

Can the physically handicapped count upon you also to recognize the supremacy of the spirit?